

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 14, 2006

Mr. Andrew B. Steinberg  
Assistant Secretary for Aviation and International Affairs  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
400 7th Street, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Assistant Secretary Steinberg:

The Department of Transportation (DOT) is reviewing proposals by Great Lakes Aviation, Ltd. (Great Lakes) to provide Essential Air Service to Dickinson, North Dakota. Great Lakes currently provides such service to Dickinson, North Dakota, with additional service to Williston, North Dakota, in the form of two round-trip flights a day. Great Lakes has filed a proposal to maintain the existing two round-trip model, as well as a proposal to provide three round trips a day. Given the strength of the service by Great Lakes and the needs of the communities, we strongly support the three round trip proposal, and urge that it be selected for subsidization.

The DOT has done excellent work with the Essential Air Service Program (EAS) and as members of Congress we have worked hard to support this important program for air service to small, rural communities all across the country. The quality of air service is especially critical to the economic well-being of rural communities, and EAS enables these communities to maintain a link to the national air travel infrastructure.

We also appreciate the support that the DOT has specifically given to the Dickinson (and Williston) communities. Four years ago, DOT increased the EAS funding for Great Lakes' Dickinson service to enable the carrier to increase the size of the planes used for the two round-trip flights to thirty seat planes. Further, when the contract was renewed in 2005 the DOT again increased the subsidy amount to maintain the two round trip flights, which had been necessitated by rising costs. We appreciate these subsidy increases, which have proven worthwhile as the DOT has seen an excellent return on its investment through increased ridership on these flights.

In fact, it is precisely because of the increased ridership and demand that a third round trip flight is now necessary. The energy production in southwest North Dakota has increased dramatically due to new technologies in drilling for oil, and this industry has led to greater demand in air service. In addition, tourism in southwest North Dakota is the second leading industry and many tourists use the airport to come to Medora and the National Park. Lastly, the area is also extremely popular among hunters who also use the

airports to come during hunting season. The increases in all of these sectors have led to steady growth of ridership and adding a third round trip flight is essential to meeting this rising demand, where passengers currently can face shortages of seat availability.

In addition to the proven need for a third round trip flight, the DOT should consider the very persuasive fact that providing for a third flight by selecting the Great Lakes three round trip proposal will not result in any increase in the EAS subsidy amount. Great Lakes worked extremely hard to streamline its costs to effectuate this proposal and DOT has the opportunity to substantially improve air service to the Dickinson/Williston communities without any increase in cost. This is in fact the very model of a success story through the EAS program.

We join with the Dickinson and Williston communities, and with the state officials in their support for Great Lakes' proposal to provide three round trip daily flights.

Thank you for your consideration. We urge your favorable decision.


Sincerely,



Byron L. Dorgan  
U.S. Senator



Kent Conrad  
U.S. Senator



Earl Pomeroy  
U.S. Representative

Cc: Dennis DeVany, Chief, Essential Air Service Division